

DEATH - CLOSING OF  
LINCOLN'S EYES

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DEATH



# The Assassination of Abraham Lincoln

## Closing Lincoln's Eyes

Excerpts from newspapers and other  
sources

From the files of the  
Lincoln Financial Foundation Collection

Washington, Saturday, April 15, 1865

Editor, Quincy Whig and Republican:

After a loss of 33 hours sleep (and an invalid at that), I attempt to give you a hastily written description, no, not a description, but to inform you of the facts connected with the most diabolical and truculent assassination known to the history of the world. My whereabouts since the occurrence will enable you to judge of the opportunity I had to affirm where of I speak.

It was announced in the daily papers on Friday that the President and Lt. General Grant, would be present at Ford's Theatre that evening, the anniversary of the surrender of Fort Sumpter and the evening of the day celebrated by the ceremony of re-raising the Stars and Stripes on that Fort. Mr Lincoln and General Grant had been formally invited and as nearly as I can ascertain, the invitation was accepted by some one in behalf of the President. Mr Speaker Colfax, who was present, informed me that the cabinet meeting of that day was protracted and unusually interesting, Mr Lincoln fully edifying them concerning his policy and plans. At the close of the meeting Mr Lincoln was applied to, to go to the theatre. He answered that he could not go, as he had an engagement, but it is too clear a fact that he was subsequently prevailed upon to go, as the sad results show. It was only in consequence of General Grant's departure from the city, rendering it impossible for him to accept the invitation and feeling that the public would be disappointed in not seeing either the President or the Lt. General as announced, that Mr Lincoln was induced to go.

(Here Rutherford gives a short description of the Theatre and the action that took place, but does not indicate that he was present.)

A few moments after the tragedy at the theatre I was running to the home of Supt. of Military Telegraphs, Major Eckart, in order to get him speedily at his post of duty for the great emergency. But a fleetest messenger than I had outstripped me; the Major had just been roused and was on his way. I then hastened to the residence of General Meigs, Quartermaster General, whose services I knew the Secretary of War would immediately require. I found that a messenger had also preceded me here and that he was about to start for the War Department. His family, knowing that the night was hideous and full of murder, entreated the General to put on his cloak to conceal his uniform, but he firmly replied: "I will not go in disguise."

We preceded together to the War Department, where the General received word from the Secretary of War to send a guard to his house, that he (the Secretary) had gone to Mr Seward's residence. General Meigs ordered the guard and directed me to assume command of the premises and to station the guards. Two companies of infantry and a detachment of cavalry were furnished and posted by me to guard the residence of the Honorable Secretary of War. It was thought very probably that the Secretary of War would be the next one assaulted as he had gone to Mr Seward's in his carriage unguarded. I remained in command until one A.M. when I was relieved by order of Major General Meigs and proceeded to join him at the house across from Ford's Theatre where the President was taken immediately after being assassinated.

The house is a small one but neatly arranged and was entirely thrown open by the proprietor, Mr Peterson, to the use of the Secretary of War, who had in charge all matters pertaining to the President's case and attention. I arrived at half past one A.M. and found the street guarded at the intersection of E and F, with infantry and cavalry. On entering the house I found the bed on which the President lay surrounded by the members of the cabinet (except, of course Mr Seward), Senator Sumner, Speaker Colfax, Gov. Oglesby, Surgeon Gen. Barnes, Generals Halleck and Meigs and others, and the adjoining rooms filled with officers of various rank among whom was Major Eckart, issuing the important confidential orders of the Secretary of War for the apprehension of the assassins and by his never resting telegraph closing the roads leading from the city, near and far. In one of these rooms, Judge Carter was engaged in taking testimony concerning the affair at the theatre. In another room Mrs Lincoln accompanied by some of her lady friends was full of agony in view of the conditions of her husband, which the Surgeon General had long before pronounced utterly hopeless. The ball which was estimated to be one half inch in diameter entered a little to the rear of the left ear on the left side at the base of the posterior portion of the brain, passing through and lodging near the right eye and causing both to protrude to a considerable extent and to turn black in a very short time. The Surgeon General's finger could be introduced to its full length into the wound.

Mrs Lincoln would visit the room occasionally during the night, each time being conducted from thence almost overcome with grief. Mr Lincoln was wholly insensible from the time he was shot and did not suffer at all. I remained offering such assistance as I could until six A.M. when nearly exhausted I went home to take a little food to prepare me for further duty if called upon. I returned about ten minutes after Mr Lincoln had expired and suggested to General Augur, Commanding Department of Washington, the propriety of having the bells throughout the city tolled. He mentioned it to Mr Stanton and the order was given immediately. Mr Stanton directed me to procure and place coppers upon Mr Lincoln's eyes. I did so. It occurred to me that I had in my purse a silver half dollar presented to me by Brevet Major General B. H. Grierson as a keepsake. Had I lived to keep it forever I could not have had a more appropriate opportunity nor a more desirable use for it than the present thought suggested. I sent and obtained another one and placed the two upon Mr Lincoln's eyes in place of the coppers. The performance of so small a function in connection with so great a man, is an honor which cannot but be intensely gratifying to the doer.

At eight o'clock the room was cleared and the Honorable Secretary designated Colonel Pelouge of the War Department and myself to take charge of the body of President Lincoln until it was removed to the Presidential mansion. At about nine o'clock a plain box arrived, which was provided by direction of General D. H. Ruckre, Commanding Quartermaster of the Depot of Washington. Mr Lincoln was placed in it and taken to the President's house escorted by troops in charge of Gens. Augur, and Ruckre, Col. Pelouge and myself. It commenced to rain early in the morning and continued during the entire forenoon. The streets were damp with mud, but they presented no barriers to the sorrowing crowd which followed. On the way to the White House we were met by the Hon. Secretary of War, whose carriage was placed in the procession, and on arrival at the mansion the body was taken to the front room on the second floor.



There was between the Chief Magistrate and his indefatigable Secretary of War, an attachment of peculiar tenacity. They were devoted friends. Until the moment I am about to mention, his important duties connected with the sudden and great Calamity, had absorbed his whole mind and attention. He had had no time to turn his thoughts inwardly, but after the box had been placed upon chairs in the room referred to, (the room was occupied by none but those in charge, and the undertaker and his assistants), Mr Stanton, after giving some directions, stepped forward, placed both hands upon the box, leaned forward, bent over, and wept as stout men do, when they weep at all. After a moment perhaps two, he slowly and solemnly stepped back and turned to leave the room, but great grief had depressed his eyes and furrowed his cheeks, for he had lost his friend.

The Secretary directed General Augur to have a general officer and another of lesser rank with the body all the time. General Augur and myself were continued in charge until twelve o'clock when we were relieved. I returned to my boarding house and have thus far progressed in narrating what I know in connection with this most lamentable tragedy. This city which has been during the week until Friday night, the scene of unparalleled rejoicing, now ears a changed and sombre aspect. Our rejoicings are mingled with tears. While we yet rejoice in the success of the great events connected with the death throes of rebellion, grieve at the fall of the man who adopted the measures midst our severest trials and prepared the nation and the world for the accomplishment, of this greatest end, the emancipation of mankind.

Very truly yours,

G. V. Rutherford

# By the Man Who Closed Mr.

By Gen. Thomas M. Vincent, U. S. A.

Secretary, and at his request, during the night.

**B**ORN in a humble cabin, in La Rue County, Kentucky, with its three-legged stool, bedstead of poles supported by crooked sticks, log table, pot, kettle and skillet, and a few tin and pewter dishes, Abraham Lincoln's ascent in life began as he "climbed at night to his bed of leaves in the loft, by a ladder of wooden pegs driven into the logs of the cabin wall."

Upon this man it was that the choice of the nation fell—the man who, in the year 1831, when an obscure flatboatman, after having witnessed the hogging of a slave woman, said, "If ever I get a chance at that institution, I will hit it hard!"

It was a frequent thing for Mr. Lincoln to visit my office (in the War Department), thus to obtain direct information. He was particularly interested in the success of the recruitment, and for his own convenience he personally tabulated the daily telegraphic reports on a slip of paper. After he had made the necessary record, he would roll the slip around a short lead pencil, and place it in his vest pocket. If the number of men obtained was satisfactory, he would sit for a brief time conversing cheerfully, but if otherwise the furrows of care on his face would indicate the sadness of his disappointment, and, without a word, he would depart.

Soon after the act of July 17, 1862, authorizing persons of African descent to be received into the service of the United States, and before the President had decided fully what he would do under it, he received an application—it may have been from a Mr. Black or a Mr. Brown—for permission to raise a regiment. In his characteristic way, he endorsed the application: "Referred to the Secretary of War. This gentle-

man wishes to engage in the ebony trade, A. Lincoln."

His interest manifested in the recruitment of colored troops is apparent from his letter, dated April 1, 1862, to Major-General Hunter, in which he said:

"I am glad to see the account of your colored force at Jacksonville, Fla. I see the enemy are driving at them fiercely, as is to be expected. It is important to the enemy that such a force shall not take shape, and grow and thrive in the South; and, in precisely the same proportion, it is important to us that it shall. Hence the utmost caution and vigilance is necessary on our part. The enemy will make extra efforts to destroy them, and we should do the same to preserve and increase them."

After the colored troops had won their reputation, he said that their daily employment was one of the greatest blows dealt to the rebellion. On one occasion, in defining the franchise, he said that some of the colored people "might be let in." They would "probably help, in some trying time to come, to keep the jewel of liberty in the family of freedom."

April 14, 1865, I had, about 10 o'clock p. m., returned from the War Department to my house, and very soon thereafter was informed by a cousin of Mrs. Lincoln—Dr. Lyman Beecher Todd—that the President had been assassinated, and the members of his Cabinet attacked. I at once hurried to the house of the Secretary of War, and learned that he had gone to the scene of the tragedy, on Tenth street. I found him at the house to which the President had been taken from Ford's Theatre, and there I remained, near the

He was greatly saddened, and referred to the change of scene from that at the Cabinet meeting, a few hours before, at which General Grant was present, when the state of the country and the prospect of a speedy peace were discussed. He stated that the President during the meeting was hopeful and very cheerful, and had spoken kindly of General Lee and other officers of the Confederacy. Particularly had his kindly feeling gone out to the enlisted men of the Confederacy, and during the entire session of the Cabinet his manner and words manifested

## Lincoln's Eyes in Death.

emphatically a desire to restore a satisfactory peace to the South. Yet, while he was buoyant on that Good Friday in his advocacy of "peace on earth to men of good will," he seemed depressed, at times, in consequence of a dream of the previous night, which had recurred several times on the eve of some important event—a vague sense of floating away, on some vast and indistinct expanse, toward an unknown shore.

About 1:30 a. m. it was determined that the wound was mortal, that the President was dying, and that it was not probable that he would live through the night. The Secretary then informed me

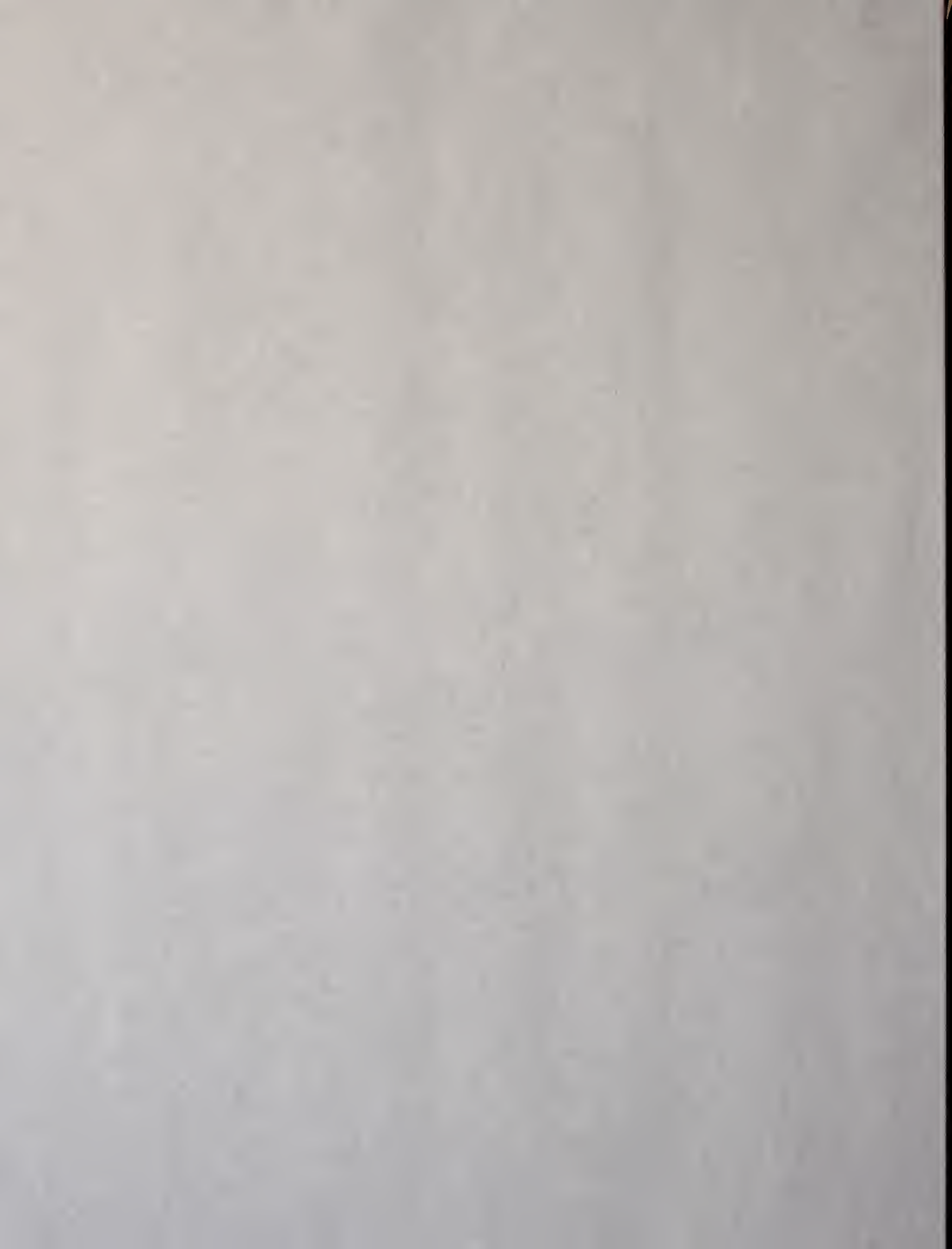
that it would be necessary to stand prepared to communicate the President's death to the Vice-President, and soon thereafter handed me the rough draft of the formal notification, from which I prepared a fair copy, and held it until after the President's death, which was officially announced at 7:35 a. m., April 15, by a telegram from the Secretary to Major-General Dix, as follows:

"Abraham Lincoln died this morning at twenty-two minutes after seven o'clock."

The death bed scenes were harrowing in the extreme. Surrounding and near the illustrious one, who was insensible from the first in consequence of his mortal

wound, from which his life's blood was oozing, were the sobbing, grief-stricken wife, all the members of the Cabinet save Mr. Seward (himself the victim of an assassin's attack), and others in civil and military circles.

Soon after 8 o'clock the devoted War Minister (Mr. Stanton) had ordered all to be arranged for the removal of the body to the Executive Mansion, and then left me, as his representative, until after the transfer should take place. It was about this time that, after pressing and smoothing the eyes of the dead President, I big the eyes of the dead President, I placed coins upon them for a last long slumber.







Courtesy Chicago Historical Society

TWO SILVER HALF DOLLARS RECALL A SORROWFUL EVENT

## The Day Miss Liberty Closed Abe Lincoln's Eyes

by Joseph M. Scheidler

This April 14 marks the 106th anniversary of President Abraham Lincoln's assassination at Ford's Theater.

Out of this tragedy and its aftermath have come many stories and legends, and one little known event connected with the death is a conflict concerning a detail of special interest to numismatists — the case of the Lincoln coins.

At least four people at the President's bedside in the Peterson's house that April morning in 1865,

claimed to have placed coins on his eyes shortly after he was pronounced dead at 7:22. All accounts agree to the time of death and to the fact that Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton said, "Now he belongs to the Ages," — although some standing by claim that he really said "... to the Angels."

But who it was that closed and smoothed the dead President's eyes and placed coins on them will probably never be solved to everyone's satisfaction. Some witnesses claim

that Secretary of War Stanton himself closed Lincoln's eyes, but Maunsell B. Field, Assistant Secretary of the Treasury, writes that he noticed that Mr. Lincoln's eyes were not quite closed so performed this duty.

Dr. Charles A. Leale, who had attended the President at the theater and during the long night in the Peterson home, said it was he alone who smoothed the President's facial muscles, took two coins from his pocket, "... placed them over his eyelids and drew a white cloth over the martyr's face."

Thomas McCurdy Vincent of the War Department said that he was the one who smoothed Lincoln's eyelids and placed the coins. He wrote that he had been left at the death scene by the War Minister to act as his representative until the transfer of the body to the White House. He claimed that soon after eight o'clock, "... pressing and smoothing the eyes of the dead President, I placed coins on them to close them for a last long slumber."

As sincere as these accounts seem to be, there exists a small but impressive collection of evidence assembled by United States Colonel George V. Rutherford of the Quartermaster General's office, that has strongly influenced some to believe that he was, in fact, the man who had the honor of this last show of respect toward the Great Emancipator.

This evidence is presently in the archives of the Chicago Historical Society Museum, and consists of two Liberty seated halfdollars dated 1854 and 1861, blackened with age and mounted on a piece of black cardboard together with four testimonial letters signed by witnesses to the coins' authenticity. Each coin has a hole drilled in it at the top, above the head of the seated figure of Liberty, and another drilled at the bottom edge of the coin, just below the date.

A black ribbon runs through the board, through the top of each coin, across the back and out the bottom of each coin, then back into the board. Between the coins, which are mounted one above the other, is a black wax seal with the initial "R" impressed into it.

During the spring and summer of 1865 Colonel Rutherford had heard of the various claims being made by others who had been at Lincoln's death bed, all saying that they had placed the coins on his eyes. So he determined to produce the actual coins, together with testimonials from three witnesses known to have been at the death scene or closely connected with it.

Rutherford admits that he first placed pennies on the dead President's eyes, but that he immediately removed them and replaced them with silver halfdollars from his own pocket. He said that later, when the coins were returned to him when the President's body was taken away for burial preparations, he put the coins aside and later had them placed in a safe as personal relics of the tragic day.

We can only speculate why Colonel Rutherford removed the pennies from Lincoln's eyes and replaced them with half-dollars. It might be that he did not consider pennies quite fitting to close the eyes of the President of the United States, and that silver halfdollars seemed more suitable. Or perhaps the small cents of that period were not sufficiently heavy to hold the eyelids closed. (Minting of large cents had been discontinued in 1857, although some still circulated at this time.)

But whatever the reason for exchanging them, it is known that the custom of placing coins on a dead person's eyelids is an ancient one. There are references to it throughout history and literature, and the custom is sometimes given symbolic meaning. One explanation is that a person should not go into

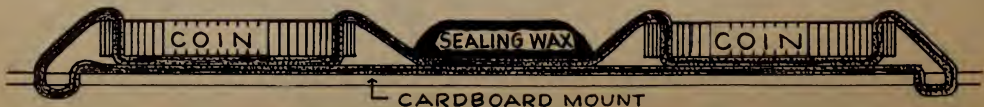


eternity penniless. Another one is that when the deceased person opens his eyes on the other shore he will discover, to his joy, that he is remembered by those remaining behind — that he did not die friendless.

But as a practical means of holding the eyelids closed until the eyes flattened and the lids became fixed through rigor mortis, the practice of placing coins held into the present century. Today doctors and undertakers use wet cotton swabs for the same purpose.

The objective of this article is, however, to investigate the coins themselves and to try to determine whether or not the ones in the Chicago exhibit are those used at the scene of President Lincoln's death.

We might ask if it is likely that coins dated 1854 and 1861 would have been in general circulation in April of 1865. It is, if we consider the mint disposition of these dates. More than seven million half dollars dated 1854 had been coined, and many were undoubtedly still circulating eleven years later. The



Philadelphia mint had coined 2.9 million of these which, like the 1853 and 1855, had arrows on each side of the date to indicate a lower silver content than previous years.

The mint at New Orleans had produced an unprecedented 5.2 million half dollars in 1954, identical in appearance to the Philadelphia issue except for the "O" mintmark on the reverse. The San Francisco mint was not yet in operation in 1854.

The circumstances surrounding the 1861 coin make it even more interesting than the 1854. More than six million half dollars dated 1861 were produced at the three mints operating at the start of the Civil War for the production of silver coins. At Philadelphia, 2.8 million were coined and the San Francisco facility minted just under one million.

In New Orleans, 330,000 half dollars had been minted for the United States government when the war broke out in April, 1861. Another 1.2 million were minted for the State of Louisiana, and about one million for the Confederate States of America. This total of 2.5 million from the New Orleans mint all have basically the same appearance, although there are minor die varieties.

It is virtually impossible to discover what mintmarks, if any, are on the coins in the exhibit without removing them from their mounting. This writer obtained permission from the Chicago Historical Society curator to inspect the coins closely and to make wax impressions of the reverse of each coin, but on each of them the ribbon passes through a hole that is adjacent to the mintmark area, and the 1/2 inch ribbon is bunched so tightly at the hole that an impression cannot be taken under the ribbon. However, the wax impressions that were made show the reverse of each coin to be in very fine to extra fine condition, with nearly full feathers on the eagles and sharp beading and clear lettering.

A careful study of the die varieties of these two dates might be of some help in trying to determine

the origin of each. But until the coins are again made available for study this method will have to wait.

The four testimonials or certifications that surround the coins are printed on a single sheet of paper and signed individually. (See illustration). At the top of the sheet is the title, "Relics" of ABRAHAM LINCOLN, Late President of the United States. Assassinated at 20 minutes past 10 o'clock P.M., April 14th, 1865; Died at 22 minutes past 7 o'clock A.M., April 15th, 1865.

The wording of the testimonials is as follows:

*Quarter-master General's Office,  
Washington City, Sept. 6th, 1865*

"I certify, that on the morning of the 15th of April, 1865, soon after the late President expired, the Honorable E. M. STANTON, Secretary of War, directed Colonel Geo. V. Rutherford, in my presence and hearing, to place some pennies upon MR. LINCOLN'S eyes. Col. Rutherford placed the pennies upon MR. LINCOLN'S eyes, as directed, but immediately substituted Two Silver Half-dollar Pieces.

(signed) M. C. Meigs,  
Quarter-master General,  
Brevet Major Gen. U.S.A.

*Head Quarters, Dept. of Washington  
Washington City, Sept. 6th, 1865*

"I certify that the Two Silver Half-dollar Pieces, used in preparing the body of the late President, ABRAHAM LIN-

COLN, for sepulture, which were on his eyes when his body was placed in the box at Mr. Peterson's house, on the morning of the 15th of April, 1865, for removal to the President's Mansion, and which were taken off by me on removing the body from the box, at the Mansion, on the same morning, were delivered by me to Brevet Major General D. H. Rucker, on the 15th of April, 1865, for safekeeping.

(signed) C. C. Augur  
Major Gen. Commanding

*Depot Quarter-master's Office,  
Washington City, Sept. 6th, 1865*

"I hereby certify, that the Two Silver Half-dollar Pieces delivered by me to Colonel Geo. V. Rutherford on the 23rd day of August, 1865, are the identical pieces I received from Major General C. C. Augur, Commanding Department of Washington, on the 15th of April, 1865, and which were deposited in my safe on the 24th April, 1865, for safe keeping.

(signed) D. H. Rucker  
Brevet Major Gen. U.S.A.

*Quarter-master General's Office,  
Washington City, Sept. 6th, 1865*

"I hereby certify, that the Two Silver Half-dollar Pieces hereto attached by black ribbon, 1/2 inch wide, and sealed in black wax with my seal — having an Old English initial R, — are the identical pieces of coin referred to in the above certificates of Brevet Major Generals M. C. Meigs and D. H. Rucker, and Major Gen'l C. C. Augur; and which were placed by me upon the late ABRAHAM LINCOLN'S eyes as directed by the Honorable E. M. Stanton, Secretary of War.

(signed) Geo. V. Rutherford  
Colonel & Chief Inspection  
Division,  
Quarter Master General's  
Office"

The document with the coins attached is dated Washington D.C., Sept. 21st, 1865, and is presented to Col. Rutherford's son, Ralph Hurlbut Rutherford.

This document is signed by men who give every indication of having believed sincerely in what they signed their names to. Nor is there any practical reason evident why they should sign their names to a lie. There was nothing to be gained. The document would, in fact, re-



*Reverse of half dollar showing position of ribbon in relationship to mintmark, if any.*



ceive little notoriety and would soon be laid aside and forgotten. And therein lies the mystery of the document — how did it find its way from Colonel Rutherford's Washington office in the Fall of 1865 to the archives of the Chicago Historical Society Museum in the early 1920s?

At one end of its journey, history is silent about the relic as such. Nowhere in the annals of Lincolniana investigated by this writer is its fate mentioned, although several Lincoln historians refer to the fact that Col. Rutherford did put together such a document with coins mounted on it. We know from the document text that it was destined to be given to the Colonel's son, Ralph Hurlbut Rutherford. We do not know that he did, in fact, receive it.

At the other end of the mystery, the document does not appear in the Historical Society Museum's records until 1926, officially. Where it languished during the intervening sixty-odd years, and how it made its way to Chicago is the mystery we will investigate.

One clue comes to us through a Chicago candy manufacturer who was one of the most famous collectors of Lincolniana in the country, Charles F. Gunther. There is a strong possibility that during his many travels around the country and his frequent attendance at auctions and brouings through antique stores, he purchased this relic and added it to his growing collection. We know that in the early '20's the bulk of his collection was purchased from his estate by the Historical Society.

Charles F. Gunther, born in Germany in 1837, was brought to America by his parents when he was five years old. He settled in Chicago after the Civil War and opened a confectionery on Clark Street, moving to 212 State Street in 1885. During this period he developed the famous Gunther caramel and became wealthy as a result of his inventions and other business ventures.

Gunther was a world traveler and avid collector of all manner of historical objects, including paintings

and books. He caused a stir when, in 1889, he had the infamous Libby Prison transported stone by stone from Richmond, Virginia, to South Wabash street in Chicago, where it was reconstructed and made into a Civil War museum.

Gunther shared his hobby also with the patrons of his confectionery by exhibiting his collection of artistic and historic artifacts in his store. A marble staircase in the back of his confectionery led to a second floor gallery which viewers said matched the finest private collections in the country. Many cases of items not on exhibit were stored on the upper floors of the building.

We can get an indication of the size of Gunther's collection when we consider that he sent thousands of military objects to the American War Museum of the Greater America Exposition held in Omaha, Nebraska, in 1899. All items sent by him are catalogued in the exposition guidebook. His contribution stands out prominently in the listing of 100,000 in the exhibit.

If Gunther possessed the Lincoln coins at this time, he did not send them to Omaha. They do not appear in the comprehensive and detailed guide book put out by the exposition committee. Many items do-

nated by Gunther to the exposition were housed in the Lincoln Assassination section of the museum at the Omaha exhibit, including the pillow, sheet and towel used at the scene of Lincoln's death and the flag which was used to wrap the President's body when it was transported from the Peterson House.

At the same time that the fair was being held in Omaha, a fire broke out in Gunther's building in Chicago, destroying nearly the whole museum and much of the collection housed in the upper floors. Gunther had earlier taken precautions against just such a disaster by storing many items in a fire-proof warehouse elsewhere in the city. These were preserved.

Gunther was in Europe at the time of the fire in his store, but his son, Burnell, in an interview with the Chicago press, gave an indication of his father's casual regard for his vast and valuable collection. "I cannot tell what was still in the museum rooms," he told newsmen, "and I do not believe my father knows exactly what was left there and what is in storage."

That a careful catalogue of his treasures was not kept becomes even more apparent if we consider





Colonel Geo. V. Rutherford

Courtesy Chicago Historical Society

the condition of this collection at the time of Gunther's death, at the age of 85, on February 10, 1920. An item appearing in the *Chicago Daily News* of March 26 of that year reports that "... the uncatalogued, mysterious and almost priceless Charles F. Gunther collection of manuscripts, relics, historical souvenirs, letters and documents is going to the Chicago Historical Society for \$150,000. Nobody knows what is in the collection. Thousands of odds and ends, ranging from antiquity through the detailed historical past of Chicago, fill the treasure trove in the Gunther building."

Among these items were George Washington's compass and camp dishes, the table on which General Grant wrote the terms of surrender for General Lee, and Abraham Lincoln's stage coach. These and many other items were purchased by the Chicago Historical Society, though not for the announced \$150,000. In fact, the Gunther relatives, Mrs. Gunther and the surviving son, Burnell, finally agreed to part with the collection for \$21,316.20. The Historical Society, interested mostly in Americana, later sold much of the foreign collection but it is unlikely that any of the Lincoln articles

were sold by the museum, which had been buying one of the largest and most extensive Lincoln collections in the country.

Museum records do not list the Lincoln coins as a separate purchase, and we cannot therefore be certain that they came into the museum's possession at this time. The exhibit has been given an "X" listing, indicating unknown origin. The authorities at the museum are virtually certain that the relics were acquired at this time and cannot explain the fact that the source of their acquisition is not given. There have been three museum fires of significance, and in two of these most of the records were destroyed, but these were in the early years of the museum. In the most recent fire a number of museum pieces were destroyed and damaged, but the files were spared.

It is unlikely that Mary Todd Lincoln, the President's widow, or his surviving children ever knew of the relics. When Mrs. Lincoln was finally persuaded to leave the White House so that the new President could move in with his family, she returned to Chicago and went into virtual seclusion with her two sons. Their scant correspondence gives no indication that the Lincolns were concerned with retaining mementos of the President.

After returning to Chicago, Mary Todd Lincoln took up residence temporarily at the Tremont Hotel and at other times at the Clifton House and the Grand Central Hotel. She also had property at two locations on West Washington Street and lived in the houses there at different times, while Tad attended local schools and Robert completed his education at Harvard where he was studying law.

For a while she traveled in Europe, spent some time in Florida and during 1875 and 1876 was committed to a sanitarium in Bellevue, Illinois. After being judged legally sane she returned to Chicago briefly, and in 1879 settled permanently in Springfield, where she lived to the age of 64, dying there on July 16, 1882. Tad had died at the age of 18 while they

were still residing in Chicago.

Robert Todd Lincoln became a successful Chicago lawyer, and in 1889 was appointed ambassador to Great Britain. He moved to Washington, D.C. in 1911 and remained in the East until his death. He was married and had one son, Jack "Abe" Lincoln, who died in 1890. Robert died in 1926 at the age of 83, the last of the male heirs of the President.

Robert had written to the Chicago Historical Society in 1885 stating that he did not believe there was anything of special value in his father's papers, letters or artifacts. He indicated that he would be willing to part with whatever the museum could use of his father's letters, notes or other properties, if they could clear the matter with the government officials, who still held most of these materials under lock and key. Robert Todd had even less regard for his mother's letters and correspondence, stating that he could see no reason why anyone would care to read them.

The mystery surrounding the Lincoln coins and the document accompanying them will possibly never be completely solved. Are the coins in the Historical Society Museum the ones actually placed on the eyes of the dead President on that early spring day in 1865? Where were they during those many years until they showed up in Chicago? Did Charles Gunther discover them in his frenzy of collecting anything and everything that captured his fancy and was of historic interest? Where did he discover it, and how did it get there?

What is presented here is based on considerable research but relatively little conclusive evidence. It is perhaps not much more than a calculated guess that these are the actual coins used at the death bed scene, and that they came from the Gunther collection. But the answers lie somewhere, and perhaps someone reading this article will have access to more information about the various phases of this mystery and can help fill out the bare bones of the story about this small tribute paid to a Great Man. ☐







